

## Gender Clinic

Victorian Pride Centre, 3B, 79/81 Fitzroy St,  
St Kilda VIC 3182 Tel: (03) 9556 5216  
Fax: (03) 9556 5256  
Email: [genderclinic@monashhealth.org](mailto:genderclinic@monashhealth.org)  
Web: <https://monashhealth.org/services/gender-clinic/>

## Information Pack for Potential Clients

*Thank you for enquiring about our clinic. We hope the information here is of help to you. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the clinic. We are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.*

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# 1. The Gender Clinic

The Gender Clinic is part of Monash Health which is the largest public health service in the state of Victoria, Australia. The clinic was established in 1975 and remains the largest government-funded clinic of its kind in Australia.

The Monash Health Gender Clinic aims to assist the trans and gender diverse community of Victoria through:

- conducting specialist mental health assessments relevant to gender incongruence and gender dysphoria in accordance with international guidelines (World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care 8,
- referring where appropriate to experienced private or public clinicians who are able to assist with hormone therapy, surgery, psychotherapy, laser hair removal or voice therapy,
- providing ongoing mental health support during an individual's gender transition and
- conducting multidisciplinary meetings to co-ordinate care for clients.

The clinic accepts referrals for individuals aged 16 and above. Clients can be referred for various reasons. Some people may want to just explore and achieve a better sense of their gender identity while others who identify with a gender other than their birth-assigned gender, may seek assistance in starting the process to make their body as congruent as possible with their affirmed gender. The staff at the clinic conduct specialist mental health assessments relevant to gender incongruence and gender dysphoria and, where appropriate, assist clients with the "transition process" from one gender to another, often with the assistance of various gender affirming treatments including hormone therapy, speech therapy and surgery.

The clinic is staffed by a multidisciplinary team comprising Consultant Psychiatrists, Clinical Psychologists, Social Worker, Endocrinologists, Peer Support Workers, project worker, research assistant and administrative workers along with external private consultants in Speech Pathology and Plastic Surgery. All clinical staff, including external private providers, meet regularly in order to evaluate the progress of clients. The Gender Clinic is committed to education, and has strong relationships with various education institutions. For this reason, clients may be asked to assist in educating future clinicians by allowing students to observe or participate in the assessment process. If you are not comfortable with this, please inform your clinician.

Procedures within the clinic are consistent with the Standards of Care (Version 8, 2022) published by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and endorsed by the Australian Professional Association for Trans Health (AusPATH).

The clinic is located at the Victorian Pride Centre, 3B, 79/81 Fitzroy St in St Kilda . If arriving by car, there are a number of on-street parking options on the roads around Fitzroy. Please check parking signs for restrictions, time limits and fees. If travelling with public transport, the number 16 and 96 tram lines are the best options. Some people may also be eligible for transport assistance through schemes such as the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme. Please contact us to see if you may be eligible or if you would like to receive more information on this scheme. Please inform clinic staff as soon as possible if you have any mobility restrictions.

For clients who live in regional and remote areas, the clinic is able to conduct appointments by teleconference. Please contact us if you would like to receive further information.

## **2. Gender Diversity**

“Gender Dysphoria” is a term that describes the discomfort a person experiences as a result of the tension between the gender assigned to them at birth and the gender with which they identify (including non-binary gender identities). “Gender incongruence” is a term that describes a condition in which the gender identity of a person does not align with the gender assigned at birth. We acknowledge that not everybody experiencing diversity in gender variance necessarily experiences distress.

To have a gender identity which differs from the gender assigned to you at birth is not a mental illness. Although very rare, it is very important to rule out other conditions that could present with gender diversity. As a result, the clinic takes great care in ensuring that a comprehensive assessment is conducted. In addition, the purpose of the assessment is to identify individual needs using a person-centred approach and to then develop a comprehensive individualised transition plan. These could include referrals to appropriate services for assistance with housing, employment and social isolation, etc. Clients who have a mental health condition such as schizophrenia, depression, Borderline Personality Disorder or Autism Spectrum Disorder are still eligible to receive support from our clinic. Their assessment however may be extended to ensure that adequate supports are in place prior to any gender-related treatments.

Staff at the clinic seek to work with our clients to establish the best medical and social options for each individual. As the WPATH Standards of Care note:

*“While many individuals need both hormone therapy and surgery to alleviate their gender dysphoria, others need only one of these treatment options and some need neither. ...*

*Health professionals can assist gender dysphoric individuals with affirming their gender identity, exploring different options for expression of that identity, and making decisions about medical treatment options for alleviating gender dysphoria (p9).”*

### 3. The Clinic's Assessment Process

We acknowledge that being able to choose a service provider is important for some clients. Minimising the barriers to accessing trans affirmative care is important and therefore we would like to inform you of pathways which you may wish to consider. A comprehensive mental health assessment is recommended prior to commencing gender affirming treatment.

#### **PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM**

The Monash Health Gender Clinic offers this assessment through the public system, at no cost. Due to high demand, however, waiting times may be longer. If you would like to take this option, please obtain a referral to our clinic from your GP.

**Please note that we will not be able to place you on our waiting list until we have received that referral.**

Once we have received your referral you will be contacted by our intake team for an initial telephone intake assessment. You will then be placed on our waitlist. While you are on the waitlist we encourage you to focus on improving your physical and mental health and to build your support network with family, friends and peers. Once you reach the top of the waitlist you will be allocated a clinician and you will then be offered appointments to be seen at the clinic. An initial series of interviews is the first phase of the assessment process; it may also include, with your consent, a detailed psychological assessment and/or a family assessment. Some aspects of the assessment may be conducted by another member of the team. In addition, ongoing monitoring or psychotherapy, if needed, involves forming a trusting relationship with a mental health clinician in order to explore their gender identity.

All new assessments are discussed at regular staff meetings during the year. During the assessment, your clinician will gather information about your experiences in relation to your gender at various stages of your life and any associated distress. The purpose of this is to identify your strengths and to also assess what supports are needed as you embark on strategies to reduce your distress. Although it is very rare, if it is felt that medical transition should not proceed at this stage, due to safety or other concerns, support and alternative strategies to manage distress will be discussed. It is a common experience to feel quite anxious before your first appointment. This, however, is a safe space in which you can explore some very personal issues. Clinicians have no expectations that you act or dress in a certain way. We encourage you to attend your appointment in a way that makes you feel comfortable. By being honest and open, your clinician will be able to form a comprehensive understanding of your experiences and needs.

If clients are approved for gender affirmation therapies and wish to proceed, they can be

referred to other clinicians for:

- hormonal treatment to masculinise the body (partially irreversible) or feminise the body (which is largely reversible);
- voice therapy;
- laser hair removal;
- and, if appropriate and when additional criteria are met, surgical procedures (which are largely irreversible).

The clinic will be able to assist in making a referral to the Endocrinology service at Monash Medical Centre or to a private endocrinologist or experienced GP. The Gender Clinic does not offer all surgical treatments at this stage. The Gynaecology department may be able to assist with hysterectomy, oophorectomy, tubal ligation and fertility preservation while the Urology department may be able to assist with orchidectomy. We are able to make referrals to appropriate private plastic surgeons for chest reconstructive surgery (top surgery) or vaginoplasty (GRS or bottom surgery). The surgeon's office will be able to advise you of their fees when you make your appointment with them. The Gender Clinic is able to provide some financial support to a limited number of clients each year to assist with surgical costs. Please speak to your clinician for further information. The clinic is also able to provide referrals and information regarding speech therapy, which is conducted through La Trobe University's Voice Clinic.

### **PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS**

There are both psychiatrists and clinical psychologists working in the private sector who are able to conduct specialist gender-related mental health assessments (please see attached list). If you are interested in seeing a private psychologist or psychiatrist we suggest choosing one who specialises in gender dysphoria for your assessment.

Clinicians working in the private system usually have significantly shorter waiting lists than the Gender Clinic. There are, however, costs to see a private clinician, even after a Medicare rebate has been claimed. These extra costs can range from \$20 to \$120 per session. For up-to-date information regarding waiting times and consultation fees, please contact the clinicians directly. Contact details are provided in the attached list of private clinicians. You will also need to contact them directly to organize an appointment.

Please be advised that clients who have undergone a mental health assessment by a private clinician and are then referred back to the clinic for other services e.g., hormone therapy, will still be subject to the usual waiting time to see a mental health clinician. Given that they have already had a mental health assessment by a private clinician, it is likely that their assessment by one of our clinicians will be much briefer.

Some GPs practice an Informed Consent model of care where the GP conducts their own mental health assessment. Further information about informed consent models of care and providers can be found at <https://auspath.org.au/>.

## **4. The Standards of Care**

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health publishes clinical guidelines (the “Standards of Care”), which are followed by clinic staff. This is to ensure that the highest standard of care is provided to all the clients who attend the clinic.

The Standards of Care are readily available at [www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org) or upon request from the clinic. The overall goal of the Standards of Care is to provide clinical guidance for health professionals to assist trans gender diverse and non-binary people with safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort with their gendered selves, in order to maximize their overall health, psychological well-being, and self-fulfilment.

The clinic applies the guidelines in a way that recognizes a person’s unique anatomical, social or psychological situation, which may suggest that a flexible approach will achieve a better outcome for the person but still in a safe manner.

## **5. Social transition prior to surgery?**

There is no requirement in the WPATH Standards of Care 8 for people to live in a role congruent to their gender identity prior to genital surgery. However, it notes that such “social transition can be extremely beneficial to many TGD people although not all TGD people are able to socially transition or wish to socially transition. Consequently, some TGD people seek gender-affirming interventions after social transition, some before, some during, and some in the absence of social transition. Social transition and gender identity disclosure can improve the mental health of a TGD person seeking gender-affirming interventions. In addition, chest and facial surgeries prior to hormone therapy can facilitate social transition.”

Social transition allows the person to develop stability in their affirmed gender, and to build confidence in their ability to live in the affirmed gender role. It helps raise awareness of the personal and social consequences of transition; which has been known to contribute to employment discrimination, marital problems and divorce, and the restriction or loss of contact with children.

## **5. Voice Therapy**

It is important to recognise that a person’s birth-assigned gender is often reflected in their voice and the way they communicate. Therefore, it is possible that you may request voice modification to reflect your affirmed gender. People who wish to modify their voice or communication style in preparation for gender transition can ask for a referral to the La Trobe University’s Voice Clinic. Clients will usually see a speech therapy student who is in their final year of training and is being supervised by a qualified speech therapist.

Speech therapy can be arranged at any time during your transition process - it may range from one or two sessions for voice analysis and advice to regular weekly sessions for focused voice modification. Because the therapy targets a person's individual needs, it is not possible to say how many sessions are required to maximise voice potential. Clients may also request to see a private speech therapist. Please discuss how to obtain a referral to a private speech therapist with your clinician.

## **6. Hormone Therapy**

Hormone treatment plays an important role in the physical and psychological transition process for many clients who attend the clinic. Hormones are prescribed by a medical specialist (an endocrinologist) or experienced General Practitioner who must be satisfied that the person is medically stable and that there are no physical contra-indications to hormonal therapy.

Please be advised that hormones are not prescribed by mental health clinicians at the clinic. However, if appropriate, we will assist in referring you to the Endocrinology clinic at Monash Medical Centre or an experienced GP, Endocrinologist or sexual health physician in private practice, once your mental health assessment has been completed. Obtaining hormones without a prescription is strongly discouraged by the clinic.

Birth-assigned males treated with feminising hormones can expect treatment to result in breast growth, some redistribution of fat, decreased body hair, slowing or stopping of male pattern balding, decreased testicular size, reduced fertility and less frequent, less firm erections, with possible loss of libido.

Birth-assigned females treated with masculinising hormones can expect a permanent deepening of the voice, permanent clitoral enlargement, mild breast shrinkage, reduced fertility, increased upper body strength, weight gain, facial and body hair growth, increased libido, decreased fat on the hips and possibly male pattern baldness.

There can be medical, psychological and social side effects for all people receiving hormonal treatment and it is important to familiarise yourself with these prior to commencing hormones. The criteria to commence hormone therapy, as specified in the WPATH Standards of Care, must be satisfied prior to referral to the hormone prescriber.

Where hormone therapy has been initiated by a GP and that GP is requesting a consultation by an Endocrinologist, a referral can still be made to the Gender Clinic. The referral will be reviewed and if appropriate, appointments will be made directly with the Endocrinology team. These referrals will not be placed on the waiting list as a mental health assessment may not be necessary.

## 7. Surgery

For some people, surgery is an important step in the transition process, and involves generally irreversible surgical procedures aimed at providing anatomical congruence consistent with their affirmed gender.

Surgery is available in Australia, but some people may choose to pursue surgery overseas; the Gender Clinic does not have any official links or affiliations with any overseas surgeons. It is important to understand that reputable overseas surgeons follow the same Standards of Care as our clinic. Therefore, they often ask for some correspondence from the clinic confirming that all the criteria have been met to undergo gender affirmation surgery. Please also be aware that surgical follow-up once someone has returned to Australia is difficult to access, however, the clinic staff will endeavour to provide support and referral where needed.

Surgery for birth-assigned males can include removal of the testicles and penis, and the creation of a vagina. Some individuals may also wish to pursue breast enlargement, rhinoplasty, laryngoplasty (shaving of the “Adam’s apple”), vocal cord surgery, and/or facial feminisation surgery.

Surgery for birth-assigned females can include removal of the breasts, and removal of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries. Surgery to create a penis (phalloplasty) or metoidioplasty (clitoral release) is associated with a number of complications that have led to the discontinuation of these procedures in Victoria. However, these procedures are still performed elsewhere.

The surgeon will provide detailed information to the client prior to the operation, including the nature of the surgical procedure, risks and possible complications and the costs involved.

At present the only surgical procedures that are available through Monash Health are removal of the uterus and/or ovaries (hysterectomy and/or oophorectomy); removal of testicles (orchidectomy); and vocal feminisation. Other procedures are performed by private surgeons, and your clinician will be able to assist in making referrals as appropriate.

## 8. Private Health Insurance

For clients who wish to proceed to surgery, it is imperative that private health insurance – with the highest level of hospital cover – is obtained, in order to cover some of the cost of these procedures. However, even with the highest level of private health insurance cover, there is still a significant gap payment. Please note that all health insurance companies have waiting periods.



Recent changes to some health funds now require that clients have psychiatric cover to ensure payment for gender-related surgeries. If you wish to pursue treatment outside of Australia, please be advised that you will not be eligible for any government or insurance rebates, and you will have to pay the full cost (travel, medical fees, accommodation) yourself.

## 9. Laser Hair Removal

The Gender Clinic has established a low-cost laser hair removal service based at Monash Medical Centre in Clayton. The clinic operates on Fridays only and each laser session costs \$50. Trans, gender diverse & non-binary people can access the service by obtaining a referral from their GP to the Monash Health Gender Clinic. These referrals will be reviewed before being passed on to the laser clinic. These referrals will therefore not be placed on the general waiting list. Existing clients can be referred by their Gender Clinic clinician.

## 10. Taking the first step and obtaining a referral

In order to make an appointment, we need to receive the following:

1. **A medical doctor's referral** (preferably your GP).

Prior to your first appointment, please provide the following:

1. A report or psychiatric assessment from any previous or current mental health clinicians (if applicable);
2. A brief (1 page) autobiographical statement explaining how gender dysphoria or gender diversity has developed in your life, including information regarding schooling, friends, family and occupation. This can give us an understanding of your background before we meet with you and provides an opportunity for you to consider your thoughts and feelings in your own written words.

**Secure eReferral by HealthLink is now our required method of referral; we no longer accept referrals by fax, email or post. Find up-to-date information about how to send a referral to Monash Health Specialist Consulting Clinics on the eReferrals page on our website.**

You can email, post or fax other paperwork to:

The Clinical Director

Gender Clinic - Monash Health

Victorian Pride Centre, 3B, 79/81 Fitzroy St,  
St Kilda VIC 3182

Tel: (03) 9556 5216 (09.00-17.00 Weekdays)

Fax: (03) 9556 5256

Email: [genderclinic@monashhealth.org](mailto:genderclinic@monashhealth.org)

It is important to remember that the assessment and management of gender diversity can be complex and different for all individuals, and that body-changing interventions are not appropriate for all clients, or preferred by them. Diagnosis, treatment and side effects differ from one person to the next, therefore, this information is an outline only and should **NOT** be understood as a substitute for specific advice from an appropriate health professional.

It is also important to note that the reality of gender diversity can also have a profound effect on the well-being of those who share lives with people experiencing these conditions, including parents, partners, children, friends and colleagues. It is important that careful consideration be given to their needs and usually it is recommended to seek professional advice before discussing these issues.

We hope this information answers some of your immediate questions. Please feel free to contact us if you require further information and we look forward to meeting with you.